

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 23, 2021

The Honorable Anthony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2100 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

With the entire United States now open in some capacity, Americans are once again traveling and re-energizing the economy. After countless businesses survived the pandemic through great resilience, creativity, and the ability to adapt, it is very concerning that the Bureau of Consular Affairs at the Department of State has failed to make any adaptations. This failure of this Administration has resulted in tripled wait times for a U.S. passport. A process that took between 4-6 weeks in 2018 is now taking up to 18 weeks in many cases. While we respect and appreciate the hard-work and dedication of the men and women at the Bureau, these wait times are unacceptable. It is clear that issues relating to staff shortages, increased demand, and lack of transparency in the passport process is causing a tremendous delay in Americans receiving their passports in a timely fashion.

Due to the unprecedented delays at Bureau of Consular Affairs, families are losing thousands of hard-earned dollars as they are forced to cancel international vacations for lack of passports. Many of these families submitted passport applications months in advance, only to get to their travel date without hearing a single word from the agency tasked with helping them. Our constituents consistently face wait times for person-to-person phone calls that far exceed 2 hours, and the online portal displaying application status updates is anything but up-to-date. On top of that, calls often go unreturned and questions unanswered when our offices contact the Bureau to help assist our constituents. For months, the government has asked Americans to stay in their homes, social distance, and miss the funerals, birthdays, and marriage celebrations of their loved ones. Now, the same government that asked for those sacrifices is failing to live up to its own commitments.

In order to provide the most accurate information to the American people we respectfully request that you answer the following questions:

- Since President Biden took office, trillions of dollars have been appropriated for our nation's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. Of that historic level spending, what portion has gone toward addressing the backlog of passport applications at the Bureau of Consular Affairs?
- When did the Bureau return to full in-person staffing? If it has yet to do so, what is the timeline to get back to full in-person staffing and what impact has remote work played in the massive application backlog?
- Has the Bureau considered contracting with the private sector to assist it in meeting the expectations of the American People? If not, why?

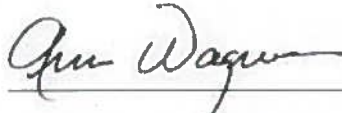
- Many of our constituents have requested expedited service but have not received it. Who is responsible for denying passport expedition and how is that decision made?
- In many cases, Bureau staff has asked Congressional staff to collect constituents' credit card information and send it to the Bureau. What steps are being taken to ensure the data and financial security of our constituents throughout that process?
- What actions are taken to ensure individuals are receiving timely, regular communication from the Bureau during the application process? When expected wait times have changed, are pending applicants notified of that change in a prompt manner?

The United States has faced many challenges throughout the pandemic, and now is the time for the federal government to employ the practices and policies aimed at getting life back to normal. The pandemic has presented opportunities for the government to work for the people, and we must ensure it does so effectively. We look forward to your expeditious response and action to resolve this issue.

Sincerely,



Blaine Luetkemeyer (MO-03)  
Member of Congress



Ann Wagner (MO-02)  
Member of Congress



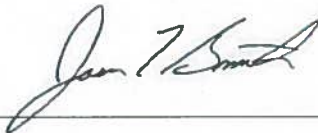
Billy Long (MO-07)  
Member of Congress



Vicky Hartzler (MO-04)  
Member of Congress



Rep. Sam Graves (MO-06)  
Member of Congress



Jason Smith (MO-08)  
Member of Congress